

DEFENSE BUSINESS BOARD



Robert “Bob” Holland, Jr. Essex Lake Group, LLC

Robert Holland Jr. is an African American businessman who served as the first black Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Ben and Jerry’s, the ice cream manufacturer. Holland was born in April 1940 in Albion, Michigan to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Holland, Sr., the third of five children. Robert Holland, Sr., a foundry worker and one time member of the Albion City Council, died of tuberculosis when Robert Holland, Jr. was young, which forced his mother to raise the five children alone.

After graduating from high school in Albion, Holland attended Union College in New York. Because of his dedication and commitment as an undergraduate, Holland received the Daggett Prize, which was given each year to a senior who displayed excellent conduct and character. While in college, he volunteered at St. John’s Camp and Children’s Hospital, a cancer treatment facility near Springfield, Illinois. Holland graduated from Union College with a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Mechanical Engineering in 1962. He then earned his Master of Business Administration (MBA) in International Marketing from Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College in New York.

Immediately after receiving his MBA, Holland found a job as an engineer and sales manager for Mobil Oil Co. He worked there until 1968, when he settled into a position at McKinsey & Co., where he was a project manager for global marketing accounts. While working for McKinsey & Co., Holland began to be known as the “turnaround” expert; because he was able to help struggling companies flourish.

In 1994, Holland was referred to Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, the company’s founders, after they initiated a campaign in search for a new CEO for the company. The slogan of the campaign was, “YO! I’m Your CEO.” The campaign itself attracted over 25,000 candidates and became one of the most publicized searches in corporate history. Holland decided to pursue this position partly because he remembered the segregated ice cream stores in Albion when he was a child. Holland was asked to compose an essay; he chose to write a poem called “Time, Values, and Ice Cream.” The essay recounted the story of his experience with this segregation.

On February 1, 1995, Ben and Jerry’s Corporation hired Holland as their CEO, making him at the time the first African American to head a major corporation. Holland stepped down however in 1997 after only 20 months on the job to purchase and lead Workplace Integrators, a Belleville, Michigan manufacturer of office furniture.

He then became a General Partner with Cordova, Smart & Williams, LLC, a New York based private equity firm.

Robert Holland, Jr. is currently the Corporate Director, Managing Partner, Chief Mentor and Advisory Board member of Essex Lake Group, LLC an international profit enhancement firm

that specializes in the application of granular-level modeling and analytics techniques. Mr. Holland is also in the preliminary stages of developing a fund to invest in mid cap businesses in West Africa.

He lives in the New York City area with his wife, Barbara, and has three kids, Robb, Kheri, and Jackie.